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ABSTRACT

This discussion of the responsibilities of an English as a second language (ESL) program administrator in a university setting focuses on issues in four areas: (1) program; (2) students; (3) faculty; and (4) administration. In the first area, the ESL administrator establishes and maintains the curriculum, decides the combination of components (intensive and non-intensive) and the format (integrated skills or separate skills) the ESL program should have, selects placement tests, decides cut-off scores, and orders initial textbooks. In the second area, the ESL administrator is responsible for the recruitment and retention of students, and for the provision of student services. In the third area, the ESL administrator must hire well-qualified teachers, maintain appropriate salary levels, and provide for professional development to keep morale high. In the final area, the ESL administrator must manage budgetary expenditures, cooperate with other units on campus, and maintain a balance of students within the ESL program. (DJD)

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ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS

ERIC Digest

ESL Program Administration in Higher Education

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Prepared by Robert Fox

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Although the teaching of English as a second language (ESL) has a long tradition in the United States, it was not until the 1940s that ESL teaching began to emerge as a profession. Since that time, the profession has gained in stature and recognition, and now most states have teacher certification or endorsement in ESL. Yet one major area of concern has been discussed very little in the literature or the classroom: ESL program administration.

Many of the administrator's responsibilities will be the same whether the program is K-12, adult education, or university-based; however, the actual duties of an ESL program administrator vary according to the type of program. This *Digest* will introduce the prospective administrator or interested teacher to the particular concerns of the university-based ESL administrator, including program, student, faculty, and administrative issues.

Program Issues

One of the administrator's primary concerns is the establishment and maintenance of the curriculum. The administrator, in consultation with the faculty if a faculty has already been hired, must examine the goals of the program and establish a curriculum that will meet these goals. An ESL program may include both an intensive and a non-intensive component.

Intensive Component. This component should have at least three levels: beginning, intermediate 1, and intermediate 2. As the program grows, the administrator may need to create additional levels to place more advanced students. This component may be structured to follow either an integrated skills format or a separate skills format. An intensive session normally lasts from 7-14 weeks with approximately 20 class hours and 5-10 lab hours per week.

Integrated Skills Format. In this format, students are placed at a given level (e.g., intermediate 1) based on their overall placement test scores and possibly also on the results of an oral interview. The students are taught all skills (reading, writing, grammar, and listening/speaking) at this level and remain at the same level for the duration of the course.

Separate Skills Format. In this format, students are placed in separate classes (grammar, reading, writing, and listening/speaking) based on individual placement test section scores (e.g., beginning in listening/speaking, intermediate 1 in grammar and writing, and intermediate 2 in reading.) This system permits students to be placed according to their proficiency in specific areas and helps them to advance through the system more rapidly. At the end of each session, either a standard or a teacher-generated exit test determines if the student is ready for the next level.

Non-Intensive Component. This component should include: (1) an advanced level (may also be part of the intensive program); (2) a pre-university-level writing course for students beyond the advanced level but not yet ready for required university English composition courses; and (3) the required university English composition courses. In addition to general sections of English, the administrator might develop sections of English for special purposes (ESP) for students in business, economics, or computer science.

In both the intensive and non-intensive components, the administrator is responsible for the selection of the placement test, for the establishment of the placement system (e.g., determining cut off scores), and for placing students at the appropriate level. If placement is accurate, and if the program is structured and monitored carefully, the average student should complete the requirements of a given level in the allotted time. If the failure rate is above 10-15%, then either the placement system has been insufficiently fine-tuned, or the curriculum needs to be reexamined and modified.

The administrator is also responsible for ordering the textbooks and for selecting initial texts in a new program. After the initial selection, however, texts should be ordered only after consultation with the faculty. To facilitate the selection of texts, the administrator should maintain a library of currently available texts for teacher review and should encourage the development and publication of teacher-generated materials.

Overall, the ESL administrator's best guides to the effectiveness of the curriculum, materials, and placement system are teacher feedback and the success of students once they have entered degree programs. Moreover, the administrator should not hesitate to make changes in the program based on teacher feedback.

Student Issues

Other areas of primary concern to the ESL administrator are the recruitment and retention of students, and the provision of student services. The administrator must develop the contacts necessary to promote the program and to make it attractive to potential students, and must provide incoming students with essential information. Students applying directly to the intensive program to study English only normally do not correspond with the university admissions office and do not receive the general information sent to incoming degree candidates. The ESL administrator must, therefore, provide prospective English only students with information about the location of the program; weather conditions; the availability and cost of housing; the cost of tuition, fees, books, and miscellaneous expenses; health care and insurance; and Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) regulations and procedures for obtaining a student visa (F-1). Students who have been admitted to degree programs and referred to the ESL program by the university will be given the above information, as well as detailed information about the university's English language proficiency requirements, by the general admissions office.

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An initial English proficiency test should be required before any international student's application to a degree program is processed. After the ESL administrator has evaluated these test scores, the university can advise applicants as to how much English they may be required to take before they can begin full-time university study. Unless the ESL administrator has already determined that a student is proficient and need not be tested again, all international students should be tested by the ESL program upon arrival to the university. The English requirement established by the ESL administrator should be binding. If a student is deemed to need a semester of intensive English before beginning university studies, this requirement cannot be waived by another department.

For all students enrolled in the ESL program, the administrator must assure the availability of support services. Although the library, language lab, and computer lab are normally provided by the university, the ESL administrator must arrange for those services specific to the needs of the ESL program. Among these services may be a reading lab for intensive reading practice to help students become more efficient readers, a small library of selected reading materials for extensive reading practice, and a writing lab to help those students who have specific and persistent problems.

The ESL administrator should also provide an academic counselor to help students with registration procedures, to advise them about universities and programs, to help them with personal problems or refer them to someone who can help, and to serve as an international student advisor to handle INS problems and process I-20 immigration forms for students, if the university's international student office does not have sufficient staff.

Opportunities for ESL program students to meet American students should be an integral part of the ESL program. Conversation partners programs pairing foreign students with American students having similar interests, and international potluck dinners provide international students the opportunity to meet American students in a social setting.

Faculty Issues

Because the ESL profession has not yet attained the stature of the more widely recognized fields in teaching, and because many university administrators still feel that anyone who speaks English can teach ESL, the ESL administrator must be careful to hire only those faculty whose qualifications meet those established by the profession, and ensure that the faculty are paid a salary equivalent to that of their colleagues in other departments. Since the morale of the faculty is important to the success of the program, the administrator must make sure that the ESL faculty are treated not as second class citizens, as they are in some institutions, but as professionals. Job security is important to any professional; therefore, the faculty should be composed of a core of full-time teachers supplemented by part-time teachers as the need arises; however, no more than 10-15% of the ESL faculty should be part-time.

Since the faculty are the ESL administrator's most valuable resource, the administrator should provide for their development through in-service workshops, guest lectures, and staff meetings, all of which should be held during normal working hours. This training can be arranged by carefully scheduling classes so that a block of time is available for meetings during the week. The faculty should also be encouraged to attend professional meetings and conferences (some financial assistance should be made available for out-of-town travel) and to become actively involved in the profession. When making salary adjustments, the administrator should take into consideration both scholarship and service, as well as teaching, if the opportunity for involvement has been provided and the expectation of involvement in the profession has been made clear.

New faculty should receive an orientation to the program and be given a faculty handbook explaining the structure of the program and curriculum, and the responsibilities and duties of the faculty. The handbook should also specify evaluation procedures (peer evaluation, student evaluation, or administrative evaluation), grievance procedures, and the dismissal policy. The entire ESL faculty should be involved in the operation of the program by regularly meeting with the administrator as a faculty advisory council and by serving as level or skills coordinators.

Administrative Issues

The ESL administrator is necessarily concerned with a number of other issues. Among the more important concerns is financing, which includes the income-expenditure ratio to be maintained and the allocation of funds for salary, benefits, supplies, etc. A reasonable balance must be maintained to ensure that the program is not over budget. Other administrative concerns include how to attract future students and how to maintain a cultural and linguistic balance so that the student body will not be dominated by any single group. Another concern is the location of the program within the institution. Will the administrator report directly to a vice-president, a dean, or to a department head? The most viable relationship must be determined on an individual basis. Related to the status of the program is how the program can best relate to other units on campus and how it can best serve as an academic unit responsible for all international students.

In general, the overriding goal of the ESL program administrator is to ensure that international students learn English as efficiently and economically as possible; it is the ESL administrator's job to facilitate this process by actively monitoring all aspects of the ESL program.

For Further Reading

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